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Short Notices on Indo-China (*After*)
II
Wild Dogs of Indochina — Phu-Quoc Dogs
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[Translator's note: For clarification, this section speaks about two separate types of dogs, the first a wolf-like wild dog that he simply calls 'wild dogs', and then the Phu Quoc Dog afterwards.]

Cochinchina has a species of wild dogs that have many analogies with the wolf; they are found in the forests of Tay-Ninh, Thudaumot, Bien-Hoa and Bheria. Living in the woods, far from villages, these animals are a plague for the game of which they make their main food : wild boars, fallow deer, roe deer, peacocks, chickens and roosters are subject to fall to the teeth of these wild animals which, often, get together in packs and hunt these various animals relentlessly.

As G. Leroy has said about the wolf, the necessity of plunder, the habit of murder and the daily enjoyment of the dismemberment and bloody animals does not seem to form a very interesting moral character in these wild dogs. However, except in the case of rivalry, the natives who live in the middle of the forests and who can, therefore, observe better than anyone what is happening around them, do not say that these wild dogs exercise direct cruelty against one another, nor that their wounded is left to die and devoured by his fellows.

Be that as it may, it is normal to doubt this fact, as it is unusual. Moral relations cannot be very extensive between animals which have no need for society; any being who leads a hard and isolated life, divided between solitary work and sleep, must be very insensitive to the tender movements of compassion. It is probably the same with wild dogs like wolves who, despite the proverb, must often eat each other.¹

Of medium size, rather thin, with a light brown coat, long and bristly hairs, especially on the tail which is in the shape of a plume, erect ears, the sides rather tucked in, with an elongated muzzle, a very large head, powerful jaws, brown eyes, subtle odor, excessively sharp hearing, keen eyesight, bulky necks, Cochinchina wild dogs live constantly in the forests, alone, sleep there most of the day and roam overnight. Often meeting in sizable packs, they traverse very vast territories: they walk in the dark and do not stop until daylight, to hide in thick thickets. Like wolves, they do not always live confined to a specific area, they sometimes undertake long

journeys; also bands of these animals have been met, a few days apart, in certain parts of the East rather distant from each other.

When these wild dogs have flushed prey, they form a kind of crescent, slowly crawl towards the animal they covet, so as not to alarm it, and when they perceive that they have suitably surrounded the object of their desire and that they are able to cut off any retreat, they then rush on it suddenly while uttering frightful howls; thanks to this maneuver, the roe deer, the fallow deer or the wild boar are forced by the wild dogs to flee by the only open way which they believe to be their salvation, only to be strangled by a fresh pack that awaits them.

If we manage to take one of these wild dogs, we soon realize that, like the wolf, it has similar faculties as the domestic dog; like him, he has strength, patience, developed senses, intelligence; but he has neither the devotion nor the nobility of character, which is due, perhaps, to the fact that man is not educated enough about them².

These animals have many good qualities which have not been developed in them. Fear and mistrust are always what is generally noticed in them. Though it takes them very long to get used to the new rule imposed on them (by people), they nevertheless manage to be very sensitive to the caresses of their master and even give him proofs of loyalty that cannot be seen in the wolf which, despite the understanding we have of them, will always remain selfish and savage.

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The island of Phu-Quôc (Gulf of Siam), in Ha-Tien province, nurtures a very remarkable breed of wild dogs or rather stray³ dogs.

The Phu-Quôc dog, by its size, its coat, its head, its neck, its muzzle, its flanks, its jaws, its eyes, its sense of smell, its hearing, its sight, its strength, its paws, etc., is absolutely reminiscent of the common wolf of France, but does not resemble it in every way and is closer to the wild dogs of eastern Cochinchina.

Here is a roughly accurate description:

The length, from the tip of the muzzle to the base of the tail, is 0m94.

The tail is thick at its base, tapering to the tip. It is not bushy and hangs down to the tibiotarsal joint (hock). The Phu-Quôc dog, unlike the wolf, (whose tail is) held almost horizontal, (has a tail that is) raised and curved forward; its length is approximately 0m33.

The height at the withers is 0m66.

The spine is straight, a little curved towards the hindquarters; it has, between the withers and the rump, a dark band, 0m06 wide at its base and tapering towards the end. This ray or band

is formed of stiff and reversed hairs, which is a distinctive feature of this breed of dogs, which is passed on to their descendants.

The head is large; its length is 0m15 between the two ears.

The muzzle is black and straight, long and pointed.

The forehead is slanted and wrinkled.

The lips are black, as well as the tongue and the palate.

Around the neck 0m45.

The ears are black and straight, 0m10 long; the hairs which cover them are very fine. Their width is 0m11 at the base. They end in a slightly rounded point.

The eyes are brown, shining at night, large and circled in black, slanting and set in the direction of the nose.

The eyelashes are very short and the eyebrows defined.

The legs are long, heavy, strong, very straight. Those in front have four toes with strong nails and a fifth on the radiocarpal part, a few centimeters from the others (dewclaw). On the hind legs there are only four toes, also armed with nails; but lacking the fifth. The width of the leg is 0m06.

The chest has an area of 0m20.

The Phu-Quôc dog generally has a yellowish coat, the hair is short, but smooth, lighter in color under the belly than on the back.

The upper and lower jaws are each armed with two powerful canines curved inwards and six small incisors.

The body is generally quite thin; the flanks tuck up.

Like the wolf, the Phu-Quôc dog has very delicate senses. He has good hearing, good eyesight, and a good sense of smell. He can hear a slight noise from a great distance; he often senses things from further away than he sees; if he comes across a trail, he knows which animal it is from.

It must be said, however, that these dogs usually only hunt on sight. They get together and set out on a quest. As soon as they see the animal they are to prey on, they surround it, like the other dogs in question, but do not even give it hope of being able to escape. As they have very powerful fangs, if the charged animal is a wild buffalo, several of them, the most daring, cut its hocks with their teeth, and the animal which turns its head to them by turning in a circle, does not take long to collapse on the ground, and immediately they begin to reap the spoils.

As the dogs of Phu-Quôc are very well-muscled and resistant to fatigue, any deer, boar or buffalo seen is a lost animal, destined to become their prey.

In terms of domesticity, these dogs always keep a wild character; they barely know the one who feeds them.

They do not bark like other dogs, but have a sort of howl to show their satisfaction. Their powerful jaws armed with strong, extremely sharp canines make them terrible enemies to other dogs, which they quickly strangle.

Males and females are almost alike in every way, but the latter is a little less robust.

The breed of these dogs is tending to disappear more and more; today, only a few rare specimens remain in Phu-Quôc (Island) itself.

1 He says this in rather flowery language, but he is essentially saying that animals do not need society, therefore do not need or have morality. Wild animals that live such hard lives in isolation have no need for compassion. It is normal for wolves and wild canids, then, to eat the remains of animals in their pack. Therefore, it is weird that these particular wild dogs do not do so.

2 “à ce que l'homme n'a pas fait son éducation” : more literally, ‘that man has not done his education/homework.’

3 “des chiens marrons” : literally, ‘chestnut/brown dogs’ which, given the context, may be outdated slang for a semi-wild or stray dog.

Source: Internet Archive

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